



CHANCELLOR'S NOTES

Chancellor Rhee's regular newsletter on learning, schools and system-wide reforms in DC Public Schools

January 8, 2010

What School Budgets Say About What We Believe The FY 2011 Budgeting Process



With pressures all over personal, business and government spending right now, any topic might seem more appealing than budgets. But when we consider the relationship between budgets and what they say about our beliefs, values, plans and visions for children, this is one of the most revealing topics we can discuss. We might be using words like funding allocations and fiscal responsibility, but we are really talking about things like equity, hope and opportunity.

It is clear that the path to prosperity is education. One of the first signs of progress in any culture is the building of schools and more access to academic opportunities. One of the first signs of freedom being compromised is the restriction of children's education.

School Budget Process for 2011

We closed calendar year 2009 with our school budgeting process for 2011 well underway. In November we held our first [community discussion of the system's FY 2011 budget](#), collecting community input on this important topic.

In December the [school budget development process began at Patterson Elementary School](#). School principals, Local School Restructuring Team (LSRT) chairs, other school representatives, and members of the community came to hear about the process and projections for 2011. Many good questions were asked of me and my department heads for operations, family and public engagement and procurement.

This will be a challenging budget year for DCPS, as it will be for many school districts. With the stimulus funds allocated for only 2010, and continued decreases in tax revenues, we all will have less money to work with. But these are challenges that we can meet together, starting with transparent and substantive discussions among all stakeholders.

[Learn more about the FY 11 budget process and timeline.](#)

Budgets and Beliefs

Key to making good budget decisions is keeping our beliefs front and center. Here are a few of the priorities we want to guide our budgeting.

The majority of our resources belong in schools and classrooms. In the face of anticipated reductions and a smaller overall DCPS budget for 2011, we are decreasing central office spending to protect money for schools. The central office budget is going down from 4.9% to 4.3% of the overall budget.



All students should have access to art, music, PE, librarians and counselors. It was clear to me in the summer of 2007 that we needed a change in the way resources were allocated to schools. Elementary school students in our poorest wards were writing to me asking if I could let them have a music teacher, an art teacher or a librarian. Even with obesity levels that are literally killing citizens disproportionately in lower income wards, some schools did not have PE teachers.

Instead of continuing the per pupil spending formula that was resulting in more main office positions than these important positions in some schools, we moved to a [Comprehensive Staffing Model](#) that ensures all students have access to art, music, and PE teachers, as well as librarians and wrap-around services such as social workers and psychologists. We are hoping to preserve this model in 2010 and 2011.

Even in difficult economic times we must continue to protect and challenge our most vulnerable student populations. At our December meeting that set expectations about school budgeting, our director of bilingual education detailed plans for meeting the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs),

and our chief of special education outlined the ways to ensure smart resource allocation for students with special education needs.

As a school system we have multiple other priorities and responsibilities to children no matter what fiscal challenges we face, and I invite you to stay up-to-date on the process of budgeting to meet these responsibilities on dcps.dc.gov.

We are confronting some real fiscal challenges in 2011, and the budgets we craft mean choices in children's lives. If leaders protect schools and children first through our city, state and federal budgets, we will shield children from the obstacles that are ours to overcome, eradicate inequities, and arm all citizens with education in the most powerful long-term strategy for building prosperity a city can provide.

The FY 2011 Budget Process: Increasing transparency and community involvement

For decades the DCPS budget has been one of the most complex budgets in the city, with many challenges in process and transparency. In fact, as the only district in the country in high risk status with the Department of Education, in 2007 we faced as dire a starting point in budgeting as we did in academics.

Fixing this has been an enormous challenge, but we are making progress every year. Even in a troubled economy, with support from the mayor and the DC Council we have been able to increase resources flowing to thousands of children. With President Obama's allocation of stimulus funds we have also been able to protect school budgets and jobs more than we could have without it.

Alignment of Schools to the Larger Community: Now that we are under a mayoral governance structure, we submit our budget to the mayor, and school budgets are aligned to his vision for the city in a way that wasn't possible before.

Reformed Budgeting Model: Preserving the Comprehensive Staffing Model (CSM): Starting from 0 schools in 2007, by the fall of 2009 there were 30 CSM schools with the full model. In 2010 and 2011 we hope to maintain this model, and we look forward to expanding it once the economy more fully recovers.

Starting Early: School budgeting decisions still depend upon enrollment in order to ensure schools can serve the full student body. Yet by starting earlier this year, there is more time for community input for 2011.

Sharing Data to Learn from the Past: With less tax revenue and without stimulus funds in 2011, we need every penny that we can preserve for classrooms. After analyzing costs versus spending for 2010, we identified and shared with principals the five areas in which schools under-budgeted in 2010, decreasing the possibility that schools will have budgets that will not get them through the year.

Setting Clear Expectations to Better Engage School Communities: Schools in our district have Local School Restructuring Teams (LSRTs). They are representatives from the school community who work with school staff and PTAs, providing informed voices and advocacy for their communities' ideas.

As part of our effort to engage school communities more substantively than in the past, we conducted an aggressive and personal outreach to each LSRT before December's budget meeting, urging them to attend and requiring a meeting with us and the principal for those who couldn't.

They will also be required to attend multiple meetings with the principal throughout the budgeting process to ensure that parents and the larger school community are fully represented before the budget is submitted. In schools where LSRT leaders do not respond, the principal will replace that LSRT with a group that is ready to engage with us as representatives of their communities.

Increased Transparency and Engagement: Last year the Chief Financial Officer produced school budget outlines that were more user-friendly than in the past, with more information posted online and a new website to support engagement and transparency.

This year marked the first launch meeting together with schools and the community at the same time, before individual budget round tables with principals. This gave community members more access than before to principals' questions, concerns and priorities, and outlined for community members the ways they could become more involved.

Overcoming Challenges in Accessing Budgeted Funds: Finally, once the budget is loaded and funds are allocated in 2011, schools must be able to easily access their funds. Historically our budget has connected to a procurement system that has made it difficult for business managers at schools to easily use funds in their budget, and to buy what they need easily and in a cost-effective way.

This is a challenging area to streamline. The need for checks and balances and multiple internal approvals before spending public funds, can work against the goal to provide speedy and flexible access to funds and a high level of customer service. However, after hiring a [Chief Operating Officer](#) who has achieved more difficult tasks than this as an Army brigadier general in Afghanistan, I am confident we will turn this one around. Already his weekly meetings with school business managers are yielding significant progress in user satisfaction and responsiveness, and I expect that 2010 and 2011 will see a more efficient procurement process.

Budget Development Timeline

School Budget Briefing School Year 2010-2011

Budget Development Timeline

December 16, 2009	Briefing for principals and LSRTs
December 29, 2009 January 7, 2010	Technical assistance sessions for principals, 10am-4pm at Central Office, 825 N. Capitol St, NE
January 7, 11 and 13, 2010	Budget information sessions for LSRTs and parent advisory groups, 6:30-8pm, Langdon (7 th), Savoy (11 th) and Bancroft (13 th)
January 4, 2010	Enrollment projections given to principals
January 6, 2010	Enrollment projection petitions due into the GoogleForm
January 11, 2010	Enrollment petitions decisions final
January 14, 2010	All-principals meeting to share final school budget allocations, petitions and technology
January 20-26, 2010	Technical assistance sessions for principals and LSRT's
January 26, 2010	Budget petitions due (decisions by February 1, 2010)
February 3, 2010	Budget due
February 8-19, 2010	Budget roundtables
By February 25, 2010	Principal budget presentation to school community

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(From presentation [Technical Assistance to Principals](#))

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